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ABSTRACT

As an effort to establish the effectiveness of writing remediation, this case study provides a descriptive history of Charles County Community College's (CCCC's) course, English 100, Introduction to Composition, aimed at establishing and strengthening skills in the use of words, sentences, paragraphs, and interrelated skills of spelling, grammar, and syntax. After a brief rationale for developing course histories in the face of retrenchment, the report presents a history of remedial English at CCCC from 1961, as represented in catalog descriptions of remedial courses. Next, changes in the structure of English 100 since 1973 are highlighted, including increased flexibility, a stress on student achievement, an emphasis on a student-centered format, and the adoption of two new texts. The following section presents data on student achievement in English 100 and subsequently in English 101 and 102, revealing that the mean grade in English 100 was 2.36, that 23.5% of the students elected to take English 101, and that 10% of these students passed the course. The final section discusses the purposes of English 100 from the viewpoints of faculty, counselors, and students. The report concludes that the course history makes a case for the effectiveness of CCCC's English program and justifies its retention, and identifies a trend in adults enrolling in the course to develop job skills. A student contract is appended. (HB)

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WRITING FOR ADULTS:
A COURSE HISTORY OF A REMEDIAL WRITING COURSE

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JC 830 452

William Klink

By now, everyone in education knows that the 80s are a decade of re-evaluation and retrenchment. RIF policies, program cancellations, budget reductions have become a part of today's education language. In all the talk of being effective with fewer dollars, the underlying fear is that parts of the educational process are going to be wrongly curtailed, that, to use an old cliche', we're "cutting the meat off instead of the fat." A favorite piece of fat of the budget cutters is any program smacking of 60s liberalism. These programs now find themselves on the defensive, a position that requires different skills and techniques than were required when they were on the offensive in the recent past.

One particular aspect of defense that has generally been overlooked is program history. A good program history can defend an effective education component against the budget cutters, and it can keep them from cutting off the meat, or at least from mistaking meat for fat.

A requisite for a program history is a continuously updated file on the program containing the facts and changes of the program through the years. From this file a program history can be written which would establish the effectiveness of the program, marking it as worthy of retention, marking it as meat rather than fat.

One program among many that might tempt budget-cutters is remedial writing. Most colleges have remedial writing programs of some sort, born of 60s liberalism, that can be vulnerable to reduction or recession. A course history might, however, reveal that it has changed with the time and is currently effective, as it has been in the past, but in a different and, potentially for the growth of the college in the 80s, a more important way.

One such course history for remedial English at Charles County Community College shows the value of that program, a value that would not be apparent save for a history. Its history shows that the course has become a prime course for adults wishing to develop job skills.

CASE STUDY OF ENG 100 AT CHARLES COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE.
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WRITING REMEDIATION, OR WHO GETS TAUGHT WHAT

Introduction

As an open admissions community college, Charles County Community College accepts students with distinctly differing backgrounds, social, ethnic, and in many other ways as well. One of the problems faced by many of its students is their perception and in fact their actual deficit of writing skills. Since 1961 the College has offered a remedial writing course. A study of the history of that course and some recent results shows its effectiveness and who gets taught what.

History - What Gets Taught

A compilation of early catalog descriptions shows the following:

1961-62 Catalogue 9 - Review of English (0)

Students who fail to demonstrate mastery of basic fundamentals of mechanics as shown by the English Placement Test or by previous academic record are required to complete successfully English 9. The course provide intensive review of spelling, grammatical construction, punctuation writing, vocabulary developments.

Three hours a week for one semester.

1962-63 same as above
1963-64 same as above
1964-65 same as above

1968-69 Catalogue English 9 - Study Skills (0)

Designed to assist students who, as shown by the English Placement Tests, need College preparatory instruction in basic study skills. Notetaking, outlining, test-taking, library use, and other practical skills are applied to all disciplines to help the student orient himself to college-level materials and academic demands. Students placed in this course must take English 101-X. May be taken concurrently with English 9. Students who are not required to take this course but who wish to enroll should consult the Dean or Guidance Counselor. Offered every semester.

1969-1970 English 009 - Study Skills (0)

Designed to assist students who, as shown by the English Placement Tests, need college preparatory instruction in basic study skills. Notetaking, outline, test-taking, library use and other practical skills are applied to all disciplines to help the student orient himself to college-level materials and academic demands. Students placed in this course must take English 101 X and may be required to take approximately 12 credit hours. English 101 X may be taken concurrently with English 9.

English 101 X - Composition and Rhetoric (3)

Students who show in the Placement Tests and previous academic records weaknesses with fundamentals of English are placed in this course. The same instruction in the use of fundamental principles of rhetoric that is given in ENG 101 is given in this course, but more class time is scheduled each week to allow for more frequent writing and more aid from instructors when rhetorical and linguistic problems occur. Five hours per week. Lab fee required.

According to the memory of one of the instructors at that time, the course was taught in the following manner:"ENG 100-Introduction to Composition grew out of the early experiment of ENG 101 and ENG 101 X during 1968-69. The ENG 101 course taught during that academic year was similar to the ENG 101 course currently taught. The ENG 101 X section was reserved for students who were considered remedial. Then high risk students also enrolled in ENG 009-Study Skills.

At the conclusion of the 1969-70 year, the College's guidance counselor, Mr. John Copp, recommended that ENG 101 X and ENG 009 be replaced by an English composition course that better prepared high risk students for the rigors of ENG 101. Thus, ENG 100 was introduced, a course designed to train students in basic grammar and usage and to develop their writing skills so they would be able to write a clear, well-organized, and coherent paragraph. The English Department believed that if remedial students were skilled in paragraph writing, then they would be able to easily handle the multi-paragraph essays required in ENG 101 - Composition & Rhetoric.

The topics covered in ENG 100, and the sequence in which they were taught, are listed below:

1. Words: vocabulary, meaning, word choice.
2. Sentence Rhetoric: kernel sentence, predication, passive and active voices, coordination, parallelism, subordination, modification, coherence within sentences, function words, reference, and agreement.
3. Paragraph Rhetoric: The topic and main idea, unity, the topic sentence, paragraph patterns, development, coherence and continuity."

The catalog description shows that the course remained concerned with those topics for four years.

1970-1971 Catalogue English 100 - Introduction to Composition (3)

This course is intended to prepare the student for Composition 101. The course is aimed at establishing and strengthening skills in the use of words, sentences, paragraphs, and interrelated skills of spelling, grammar and syntax. The student will be directed towards attaining a level of competence necessary for success in ENG 101 and 102. Although this course can be credited toward a degree at Charles County Community College, it is not intended primarily for transferring to another college and the credits may not be accepted elsewhere.

1971-72 same as above
1972-73 same as above

The advent of the academic year 1973-74 and subsequent years finds a catalog description as follows:

1973-1974 Catalogue English 099 - Writing Lab (0)

This course is designed to help students master the skills of either ENG 100 or ENG 101 should their progress be unsatisfactory in those courses.

English 100 - Introduction to Composition (3)

This course is aimed at establishing and strengthening skills in the use of words, sentences, paragraphs, and interrelated skills of spelling, grammar and syntax so that the student may have control of paragraph development.

The year 73-74 is important because it shows that the English Department had focused the objective of its remedial English course on sentence writing. The description and

The focus of the course has remained the same since that time.

A survey of the catalog description of ENG 100 does not show, however, that essentially the English Department was gradually working its way to a self-paced, student-centered course. After 73-74 the course became flexible, stressing student achievement. It should be noted, as well, that add-on grammar courses and writing labs also shown in the catalog were not part of the generally used college curriculum but represent special efforts by the College to deal with certain populations of students in a given school year.

The history of internal changes in the course is of value. The procedure of instruction as outlined earlier by the instructor was followed until 1973 when it became apparent that students simply would not sit still for a course which relied on instructors lecturing and presenting materials to the class on the model of a scaled-down ENG 101 - Composition and Rhetoric course, the standard college-level English course comparable to those in colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The greatest difficulty with that type of course was that once a plurality of students had stopped appearing for class, those students desiring to continue were left without peers for a discussion of writing problems, and the instructor himself was left only with his nimble wits to use class time to best advantage as the plan for the course fell apart because of lack of attendance.

A change had to be made. The choice was to change the course from one that is instructor-centered, the old model, to a new format, one that was student-centered. The idea was that serious students could continue to learn whether their peers wanted to or not. The change also left the instruction of the course less vulnerable to negative student reaction from those who were merely dropping in at the College to hide from work or the Army or to pick up VA checks. A report by Professor Williams in 1974 tends to show that one of the strengths of the course was in fact its student-centered format.

Two text books were chosen because they afforded students the opportunity to work at their own pace and with some creativity. Gowen's Progress in Writing and Strong's Sentence Combining helped at this time with the narrowed scope of the course. Rather than attempting to improve student skills in all areas of composition, a conscious decision was made to limit the course to consideration of the sentence. The goal of the course became to enable the student to write clear sentences in standard American English. Such an objective fit very nicely into the then new fad in pedagogy of setting behavioral objectives for each course. Another artifact of that era was also adopted and is still in use, the student contract (see Appendix). The idea was that by writing a vast quantity of sentences and working with repetitive exercises, the quality of the student's work was bound to improve. Furthermore, because the student had to write three essays for the course, exercises called by some "free writing," he still had to demonstrate his abilities in performing an ENG 101-like assignment.

Since the lead instructor had training in linguistics and was cognizant of new work in the transformational area that offered promise in the teaching of writing skills, he chose a textbook using the sentence combining method, a development from studies in transformational grammar. It should be remembered that the adoption of this teaching method was well before sentence combining began to be used on any significant scale in colleges and universities in the United States.

At irregular intervals various instructors made in-house studies of the effects of this approach of teaching remedial composition; some of these studies made their way into print, and a draft of one is to be found in the Appendix of this study. Meanwhile, as time went on the sentence combining method became more widespread, and significant studies finding it to be an effective method, more effective than others in fact, confirmed the value of that was being used on campus. Articles in Research in the Teaching of English are most notable, and corroborative, particularly "The Influence of Generative Rhetoric on the syntactic Maturity and Writing Effectiveness of College Freshmen" by Lester Faigley in Vol. 13, No. 3, Oct. 1979: 197-206; and "Sentence Combining in College Composition: Interim Measures and Patterns" by M. Beverly Swan, Vol. 13, No. 3, Oct. 1979, 217-224. (see Appendix)

Even while at the cutting edge of innovation, however, the lead instructor decided seemingly paradoxically, that improvements could be made by going back to a prescriptive grammar approach, in conjunction with sentence combining.

The resultant combination was the adoption of two new texts, Blumenthal's English 2600 and Klink's Sentence Writing. English 2600 had been tested by Mr. Roger Horn in ENG 101 Classes. It was found effective but somewhat cumbersome to use as a supplementary text in that course. That cumbersomeness was an advantage, however, in ENG 100 because the repetitiveness and sheer bulk of the work fit the concept that a quantity of correctly done work ensured that the student had met the goal of being able to write correct sentences. A sample of pre-course essays and post-course essays, while not proof in themselves, is a demonstration that the course can be effective. (see Appendix)

The Sentence Writing book offered all the advantages of Sentence Combining, but had more topical exercises which were appealing to the students. It was also more consistent in the patterning of the combinations. And, importantly, it offered a method whereby the instructor could provide models of different kinds of paragraph development: narrative-process or description. This was important because it provided a nice transition to the paragraph work of ENG 101 for students who might be able to deal with it, or it could be omitted if the instructor and student decided to focus only on the sentence writing aspect of the course. The book also had the advantage of being written by one of the College's instructors. This made the book more personal to the students and perhaps contributed to their motivation to do the work correctly and completely.

Current Data

"Statistical Update-Who Gets Taught" completed in 1980, a study by Professor McGovern for ENG 101, detailed the success of ENG 100. In order to update that research, more information was developed to show the effectiveness of ENG 100. For the '81 school year the following data was gathered. Names of students taking the course in Spring '81, 1) their grades in ENG 100, 2) their grades in ENG 101-102, 3) scores in Test V of 2600 (sentence structures) 4) placement data, 5) survey of the placement opinion of adults in ENG 100 judged capable of taking ENG 101 rather than ENG 100-Spring '82.

ENG 100A Spring '81

ENG 100	TESTS SCORE	ENG 101	ENG 102	ENG 205
B	88	D	-	-
A	96	B	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	100	A	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	W	-	-
B	84	C	C	-
F	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-

ENG 100B Spring '81

A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	AU	-	-
A	90	C	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	94	D	-	-
D	-	D	-	-
W	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-

ENG 100BG Spring '81

ENG 100	Tests Score	ENG 101	ENG 102	ENG 205
A	94	A	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-
A	-	A	-	-
A	-	A	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
D	-	B	-	-
D	W	-	-	-
C	-	-	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
B	-	F	-	-
A	-	B	-	-
A	-	B	-	-
D	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
B	-	W	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
B	-	B	-	-
A	-	F	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
A	-	C	-	-

ENG 100AG Spring '81

C	-	-	-	-
C	79	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
C	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	-	-

ENG 100	Tests Score	ENG 101	ENG 102	ENG 205
C	-	-	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
C	-	-	-	-
B	84	B	-	-
C	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-
C	81	C	-	-

ENG 100AC Spring '81

B	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
C	-	-	-	-
B	-	-	-	-
85		20 W3	1	

ENG 100	ENG 101	ENG 102
mean grade 2.36	mean grade 2.2	C 2.00
median B	median B	C 2.00
mode A	Mode B	C 2.00

percentage of students electing ENG 101 - 23.5 %
percentage of students passing ENG 101 - 10%

ENG 100 Grades

A	34
B	15
C	9
D	5
F	17

ENG 101 Grades

A	4
B	7
C	4
D	3
F	2*

Both F's were granted to students at Great Mills Campus.

All students who went on passed Test V in 2600 on the first attempt: minimum score 79% maximum 100%.

Of the students who went on, counselors placed only three in ENG 100 because of poor previous high school or college records or poor test scores. Of these three, two received C's in ENG 101, the other a D. Their ENG 100 grades were A, B, C.

100 B→C 101
A→D
C→C

Other than the fact that passing led to passing subsequently, there seem to be no great conclusions to be drawn here.

Of the remaining students there were no previous records in their files; they may have been counseled into ENG 100, but more likely, according to Vera Bagley, Director of Admissions, no counselor ever saw them, and they self-selected ENG 100.

Some of the data here may be compared to previous data, although imprecisely so. The low number of students going on to ENG 101 here compares with the 15 who went on in Spring '75, 17 in Fall '75, 27 in Spring '76, 2 Fall '76, 30 in Spring '77, and 12 in Spring '78 and Fall '79. These semesters saw total enrollments in ENG 100 of about 60-70 students. While there is wide variation in the numbers, and there would be in the percentages of students advancing if total enrollment figures were available, the number of those who advanced to ENG 101 during the Spring '81 semester might well be called typical.

Historically, there never has been a correlation between grades in ENG 100 and those earned by the same students in ENG 101. The results for this study are similar, and therefore are typical.

Test V of English 2600, which measures ability to recognize complete sentences, is a test of an important skill, one necessary for passing ENG 101. It would be expected that students passing ENG 101 would also have done well on Test V. Such was the case. A good first test score on Test V is a future indicator of a student's ability in ENG 101.

Most importantly, the average grade in ENG 101 of students who took ENG 100 was 2.2. This compares with the English Department's over-all Q.P.A. of approximately 2.4. ENG 101 grades of previous students are listed below for comparison:

Fall '74, 2.18	Spring '76, 1.00
Spring '75, 2.81	Summer '76, 2.45
Summer '75, 2.33	Fall '76, 2.50
Fall '75, 2.54	Spring '78 - Fall '79, 1.5

Historically, ENG 101 students who have had ENG 100 have sometimes attained higher grades than the department average. Arguably, they have been better prepared for that course than the other students. The difference in grade for this study suggests the preparation of those having taken ENG 100 is dramatically better than those who have not, when it is realized that the average Q.P.A. in ENG 101 for one typical year (78-79) was 1.78.

Who Gets Taught

Student perceptions of the course have changed markedly in the recent past. A quick scan of the history of the course description shows that the course was intended as a brushup for students who did not have the skills to successfully complete the regular college English course, ENG 101. Counselors still advise students that the course is a remedial course, a preparation for ENG 101. However, returning adult students do not perceive the course as a remedial course in preparation for the regular college English sequence. In fact, of all the students in this study, only four fit the description of the typical college freshman; the rest must be classified as returning adults. Students see ENG 100 as a vocational course which will help them in everyday written communication skills at home and, more importantly, at work. One such student said pointedly in January, 1982, "This course teaches sentence writing and that's what I want to learn. I don't care about a degree." For many, in fact, ENG 100 is now the vocation course of choice. For example, in January 1982, in all on-campus sections, 21 adults were judged by the instructor to have the ability to do the course work of ENG 101 and were advised about making the schedule change. Of these, 17 chose to remain in ENG 100, with only 4 choosing to change to ENG 101. This argues that students

indeed know the value that the course has for themselves. That this is so should not be surprising since repeated research shows that the typical community college student enrolls only for a few courses which meet his individual goals (at this College the figure is 75%) and that most have no intention of pursuing degree work. It should be noted, however, that Professor McGovern's research, albeit with only two adult students, showed that those having taken ENG 100 when advised to go on directly to ENG 101 proved to be dissatisfied with the course as they looked back on it a year later. A future study would verify whether this notion is correct by studying later responses of the same adults studied here. That the students are satisfied with self-placement in ENG 100 after they are told their option is important to the College. A recent article in the Community and Junior College Journal, Dec-Jan 1981-82, Dana L. Johnson "Evolution of a Truly Individualized Program" pp. 14-16, argues persuasively that a worthwhile, non-frustrating initial course is a key to adult student retention, an important aspect of a college's viability.

This course history, then, in addition to making a case for the historical effectiveness of the remedial English program at Charles County Community College, making its retention justified, identifies a trend that would serve the college and its adult returning student seeking vocational skills, while maintaining the integrity of its original purpose of preparing students for the regular college English sequence. A course like this is rather meat than fat, one to be enhanced rather than retrenched, a 60s course still on the offense in the 80s.

STUDENT CONTRACT
FOR
ENGLISH 100

Course: _____

Semester: _____

Student: _____

Instructor: _____

The student shall complete the following units of work in English 100:

1. From the book, Sentence Writing by Dr. Klink, the student will compose sentences consisting of transformations of basic kernels given in the text into more complex, syntactically mature sentences. The student will complete all exercises in the book unless they are waived by the instructor. The student will hand in this work in a notebook every Friday at the end of the class period. If the instructor asks the student to rework the transformation, this must be done.

2. The student must complete the programmed text, ENGLISH 2600 by Blumenthal.

3. The student must attend all classes. The instructor bears the responsibility of dropping any student from the class when the student accumulates more than three unexcused absences. The instructor will determine whether absences are excusable or not.

4. The student will complete all of the supplemental exercises assigned him by the instructor. These are excercises which will come from neither Sentence Writing nor English 2600.

5. The student will write four short essays which will be evaluated to determine if the student is capable of meeting the minimum entry-level knowledge of English 101. If it is decided that the student does not meet those requirements, he must undertake those assignments indicated by his instructor to help him meet the requirements.

If the student has met all of the above requirements except those waived by the instructor, he or she will be given credit and a grade for English 100.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. It is the usage of another's work without attribution. Any student plagiarizing will receive an F in the course.

Signed _____ Student

Signed _____ Instructor

Date _____

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